

Exodus 31

Psalm 95

Hebrews 4

Exodus 31 provides a good starting point for our discussion of the Sabbath.

Exodus 31 includes two topics: the artisans for the tabernacle,
and the importance of Sabbath observance.

In other words, Exodus 31 is all about the holiness of space and time.

In the beginning God set apart the Garden in Eden as the holy place where he met with his people

Now, in Exodus, God is giving Israel directions for how to make the tabernacle
as a holy place where God will meet with them.

Likewise, in the beginning God set apart the Sabbath day as the holy day.

Now, in Exodus, God is giving Israel directions for how to observe that day
as a holy day, set apart as a day of solemn rest.

You sometimes hear people say that in Christ there are no holy places or holy times –
or that all places and times are equally holy –

but it would be more accurate to say that *Jesus* is the holy place
(he is the temple – the place where earth and heaven meet).

What does this mean for time?

In practice, we *should* distinguish between the holy and the common.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul talks about what happens
when you have a believer who is married to an unbeliever.

He says that the unbelieving husband is “made holy” because of his wife,
or the unbelieving wife is “made holy” because of her husband,
“otherwise your children would be unclean,
but as it is, they are holy.” (1 Cor 7:14)

The question seems to be, does the “uncleanness” of my unbelieving spouse
contaminate my children?

In the OT it did –

and in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah
the Israelites sent away their foreign wives and children.

But Paul’s answer is “NO!”

In Christ, the power of Christ’s holiness cleanses the unclean,
so you do not need to divorce your unbelieving spouse.

And as we saw last time from 2 Corinthians 6,

Paul will also urge the church to be separate from the world,
even using the language of Isaiah 52,
“Go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing.”

There is still a holy *place* – where Jesus is.
And therefore the *church* is holy –
not that the *church building* is holy
(except insofar as the *holy church* is gathered here!).
Wherever the church is gathered, that is a holy place.

And likewise, whenever the church is gathered, that is a holy time.
So what does the Bible say about time?

Psalm 95 reflects on the connection between creation and rest – and between space and time.

Verses 1-2 call us to sing to LORD and make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

As we take these words on our lips, we are doing precisely what the Psalm calls us to do!

Verses 3-5 then say *why* we should come into his presence with thanksgiving:

it is because the LORD is a great God, and a great king above all gods.

He formed the seas and the dry land and all creation is in his hand.

And so verses 6-7 reiterate the call to “worship and bow down” before the LORD our Maker.

For he *is* our God –

and when we sing these words, we declare that we *are* the people of his pasture.

And if this is the case –

if he is our God, and we are his people –

then the warning of verses 8-11 is a needful reminder:

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts

the way that your fathers hardened their hearts in the rebellion.

Sing Psalm 95

Read Hebrews 4

Last time we talked about the holiness of God’s name.

Anything that reveals God participates in his holiness.

Perhaps you are now beginning to see that *all sin* is a violation of the first three commandments.

All other sin begins with valuing *something else* more than we value God.

So every sin begins with having some other god besides God.

And all other sin begins with *worshiping* some other god –

bowing down to something else (and thus violating the second commandment).

And all other sin then misuses something that reveals God.

God reveals himself in nature, in other people, and in scripture –

but all other sin misuses nature, other people, and scripture,

and so every other sin involves taking God’s name in vain.

The fourth commandment likewise has an all-encompassing aspect.

Q. 57. *Which is the fourth commandment?*

A. The fourth commandment is, Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

The fourth commandment involves our use of time.

We usually focus on the seventh day, but the commandment includes the first six as well!
We are commanded to labor – to work for six days.

If we are lazy or foolish in our employments on the six days,
then we break this commandment just as much as if we work on the seventh.

Now, we shouldn't confuse "work" with "what you get paid to do."

Your "work" involves the whole of your "six days" employments.

Think about the pattern that God gave us.

God created all things in six days.

He then rested from his work of creation.

So all the stuff that God did during the creation week
is what he rested from on the seventh day.

What is your "work"?

Your work is anything that you do in fulfillment of God's call to be have dominion –
to be stewards of the created order.

There are three basic points in the fourth commandment:

- 1) six days are for your labor to reflect God's labor;
one day is for your rest to reflect God's rest ["six days shall you labor..."]
- 2) This day is not merely for you to rest--it is a day where you give rest to others as well
["you and your son and your daughter..."]
- 3) This is a day for remembering ["remember the sabbath day"]

And I would call your attention to that first word of the fourth commandment:

"Remember."

The word "remember" is closely connected with worship in the Pentateuch.

When God "remembers" his people, it is because of his covenant and promise:

God remembered Noah (when he was in the ark) Gen 8:1

God remembered his covenant (when Israel cried out in Egypt) Ex 2:24

"I will remember my covenant..." God says in Lev 26:42

When people remember God, it is as an act of worship:

Moses calls the people to "remember this day"--the Passover in Ex 13:3

The tabernacle is the place where "I cause my name to be remembered" (Ex 20:24

Dt 7-9 in expounding the first com. calls on Israel to "remember" the Lord

Indeed, when Moses recites the 10 commandments in Dt 5
he says “Observe the Sabbath day.”
To remember the Sabbath is not merely an intellectual exercise.
It is a command to worship God,
because how can you remember God and his works
without giving praise and thanks to him for his mighty deeds?
How can you remember the creation of all things without glorifying his holy name?
How can you remember your deliverance from bondage without worshipping the Lord?

I’d like to start by talking about what it means for the Sabbath to be a Creation ordinance,
and then we look at what it means for the Sabbath to be a redemption ordinance,
first for Israel, and then for the church.

1. The Sabbath as Creation Ordinance (Exodus 31:12-18)

The first thing we need to see is that the Sabbath was not simply a Mosaic institution.

The Sabbath goes all the way back to creation.

Why is this important?

Well, with most of the law –
indeed, with the Ten Commandments as a whole –
the Exodus is given as the reason for Israel’s obedience.
‘I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt
out of the house of bondage...’

But the reason for the fourth commandment goes all the way back to creation.

God created humanity in his own image.

And part of that image is to be reflected in how we work and rest.

In the same way that God worked for six days, and rested on the seventh,
so also *we* are to work for six days, and rest on the seventh.

Some people get hung up on the question of the length and nature of the creation days.

Were they 24-hour days?

I don’t know.

I don’t know how to tell time without the sun, moon, and stars,
and *they* weren’t created until the fourth day.

The text does not specify how long the days were,
it just says that these were God’s creation days.

They were the original six days.

That’s why I prefer the analogical day view.

God’s days were the “archetypal” days –

they are the pattern and plan which now structure our days.

Our week is patterned after the divine week.

But God made us in such a way that we function properly
with six days of work and one day of rest.

I once read an article by a secular Jew
who had rejected everything else from his Jewish heritage,
but he prized the Sabbath as a day of rest and refreshment
and was trying to convince Gentiles to do the same!

I think we too often think of “sabbatarianism” as a list of rules and restrictions –
(and it can become that) –
but it only becomes that when the whole point of the Sabbath has been lost.

The problem starts in one of two ways:

The first is when we begin to think that what *really* matters is our work –
and so therefore we cannot “afford” to take a whole day off every week.
This is a form of idolatry, where we do not love God with all our heart,
and so we take his name in vain,
by using his holy day for our own advancement – our own kingdom.
The second is when we get lazy and selfish in our six-day labors,
and so we find that we “have to” work on the seventh day in order to keep up.
This is really just a different form of the first –
and no less idolatrous and vain.

Either way, we are loving something else more than we love the LORD our God.

Let me put it this way,
if *God himself* worked for six days and rested on the seventh,
wouldn't that (all by itself, without any commandment)
suggest that those created in his image should do likewise?

But scripture says quite a bit about the Sabbath.
And much of that focuses on the Sabbath as a *redemptive* ordinance.

2. The Sabbath as Redemption Ordinance (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

After all, Exodus 31 starts out,
“Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths,
for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations
that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.” (31:13)

Was the Sabbath was practiced before the time of Moses.
Did Noah or Abraham observe the Sabbath day?
Maybe – but we simply don't know.

What we *do* know is that the Sabbath became a prominent part of the Mosaic Covenant.

And while Exodus 20 and Exodus 31 root the Sabbath commandment in creation,
Deuteronomy 5 does not.

Deuteronomy 5 provides the “second” giving of the ten commandments –
this time when Moses is preaching on the plains of Moab,
just before Israel enters the promised land.

There are only a couple minor differences between Exodus and Deuteronomy.
Except for this one major difference on the fourth commandment:

After emphasizing the part about you and your household – even your animals –
must rest, Moses says,

“that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt,
and the LORD your God brought you out from there
with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

In Exodus the focus is on the fact that since God rested on the seventh day,
therefore we must rest as well.

In Deuteronomy the focus is on your servants.

You must give *them* rest –

because God gave *you* rest in delivering you from Egypt.

Next week we’ll explore this in more detail,

but for today we need to see that Moses shifts the attention
from the Sabbath as a creation ordinance
to the Sabbath as a redemptive ordinance.

It’s not just that God created you in his image – therefore you should rest on the seventh day –
but it is also that God has redeemed you from bondage and oppression in Egypt,
and therefore you should give rest to those under your care.

3. “Such Set Times”: the Ordering of Time in Israel and the Church

Our catechism asks,

Q. 58. *What is required in the fourth commandment?*

A. The fourth commandment requires the keeping holy to God such set times as he has appointed in his word; expressly one whole day in seven, to be a holy sabbath to himself.

The catechism reminds us that while the Sabbath commandment focuses on the 7th day,
the fourth commandment has broader applications.

After all, it speaks of “such set times” – not just a single time.

How should we order time?

How do we “keep holy to God such set times as he has appointed in his word”?

And for that we should turn to Deuteronomy 15-16.

a. The Sabbath Principle in Israel (Deuteronomy 15-16)

Deuteronomy 15-16 is Moses' exposition of the fourth commandment.

As we have seen, there are three basic points within this commandment, and all three are expounded in Dt 15-16.

- 1) six days are for your labor to reflect God's labor;
one day is for your rest to reflect God's rest ["six days shall you labor...
but on the seventh you shall rest"]
- 2) This day is not merely for you to rest--it is a day where you give rest to others as well
["you and your son, daughter, manservant, maidservant, ox, donkey..."]
- 3) This is a day for remembering
["remember the Sabbath day..."]

1) The six and one principle is clear in Deuteronomy 15-16.

Moses applies the Sabbath principle to the "sabbatical year" – the 7th year – in chapter 15, and then speaks of the "seven day" principle found in the feasts of Israel in ch 16. In Leviticus there is a strong *eighth day* principle connected to the feasts, but in Deuteronomy the focus is on the seventh day.

The sabbatical year in chapter 15 is oriented towards relieving the affliction of the poor (remembering God's mercy to them when they were in Egypt), and the feasts in chapter 16 all highlight their deliverance from Egypt.

2) This day is not merely for you to rest--it is a day where you give rest to others

Dt. 15:1-11 commands this with respect to loans.

Every seventh year, you were to forgive all debts
(the "bankruptcy" of the ancient world)

and Moses calls Israel to lend freely to the poor –

don't start thinking, "Ah, the seventh year is near" and so refuse to lend!

Likewise, Dt. 15:12-18 says that Hebrew slaves must serve for six years, and then be released –

and when you send him out in the seventh year,

you must give him provisions to help him re-establish himself.

We need to see something here.

If all you do is become a strict sabbatarian, and refrain from work on Sunday, you will miss most of the point of the fourth commandment!

Jesus speaks of the Pharisees who tithe their dill, mint, and cumin, but neglect the weightier matters of the law.

We need to order our lives according to the principle of the Sabbath.

How we think about labor and money needs to be oriented by the Sabbath.

As those who have been *given* rest by God,

we need to give rest to others,

and we need to devote our resources to that end.

3) This is a day for remembering

Dt. 16:1-8 commands this for the Passover

Passover/Unleavened Bread in Spring (16:1-8)

like the Sabbath, you "observe" the Passover –

remembering is not just an intellectual act,
but it involves worship and *rest*.

The seventh day of Passover was not always on Saturday –

but it was a day of rest and solemn assembly.

Dt. 16:9-12 commands Israel to observe the Feast of Weeks

Like the Sabbath, you are to give rest to others

by including them in your celebration (v11):

“you shall rejoice before the LORD your God,

[notice how the language parallels that of the fourth commandment]

you and your son and your daughter,

your male servant and your female servant,

the Levite who is within your towns,

the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you,

at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there.”

Dt. 16:13-15 commands this for the Feast of Tabernacles

a feast of thanksgiving for the harvest (threshing and pressing)

Verses 16-17 then state that God required every male to appear before the LORD
three times each year.

It's worth noting that God required faithful Israelites to participate in corporate worship
three times each year.

Certainly those who lived close to the sanctuary could participate more often,
but three times every year, you were supposed to travel to the tabernacle.

Now, all these things were specific applications for the Israelites.

We don't ask farmers to bring the first 10% of their soybeans to church!

We don't insist that banks forgive mortgages every seven years! (wouldn't that be nice!)

We don't all gather in tents outside the meeting house here every fall!

So how should Christians think about the Sabbath?

[Please turn to Hebrews 4]

b. The Sabbath Principle in the Church (Hebrews 4)

Our catechism asks:

Q. 59. *Which day of the seven has God appointed to be the weekly sabbath?*

A. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian sabbath.

Why do we talk about “the Christian Sabbath”?

If the Sabbath is an eternal sign between God and Israel,
then we should not be surprised to see some continuity between the OT and NT sign,
because all of the signs of the OT point us to Christ,
and through him to NT signs as well.

But there is a problem with the Sabbath.

The Sabbath keeps coming around every week.
Every week we have a sign of God’s rest.
Every week we are reminded that God entered his rest on the seventh day.
Every week we also work for six days,
and then rest from our labors on the seventh.
But then comes Sunday morning (remember that the Jews celebrated Saturday!)
The first day of the week dawns,
and we are no closer to that eschatological rest than we were last week.
The seventh day, for the Jew, is an ever-recurring reminder
that there must be another day.

And that is the point of Hebrews 4.

Hebrews 3-4 is an extended commentary on Psalm 95,
which speaks of the need for the people of God to heed God’s voice “today,”
lest they fail to enter God’s rest.
God calls us to enter his rest—to believe his promises, and walk in his ways.
(Read 4:4-11)

⁴ For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” ⁵ And again in this passage he said,

“They shall not enter my rest.”

⁶ Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷ again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.”

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

¹¹ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

God entered his rest on the seventh day of creation.

The image is rather simple.

Genesis tells us that God created the heavens and earth in the space of six days.
Each day begins and ends with “and there was evening and there was morning,
an “Nth” day.”

But after the seventh day, there is no such statement.

Hebrews takes the silence of Genesis 2 as suggestive.

The reason why Genesis never speaks of the “end” of the seventh day,
is because the seventh day has not ended.

God’s work was a six-day work,
but his rest is never-ending.

And when God promised Adam an inheritance of life,
he was calling Adam to enter into his rest.

The whole history of redemption can be seen focused around this idea of rest.

Israel was called as God’s firstborn son to enter his rest.

But at Kadesh, in Numbers 14,
the son refused to heed his Father.

He refused to enter God’s rest,
and so God swore in his wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.”

In other words,

Israel has repeated the sin of Adam.

God promised Abraham that through his seed all the nations would be blessed,
but it will not be through the wilderness generation!

The first generation of Israel repeats the sin of the first generation of Adam.

It is not the first Adam—it is not the first Israel—nor is it the first Joshua, or the first David,
who will enter God’s rest.

When Adam failed to enter God’s seventh day rest,
that was the moment that created the necessity of another day.

If man was going to enter God’s rest, there must be another day—beyond the seventh day.

There must be a new “day”—an eighth day, as it were, when man can enter God’s rest.

Hebrews says that if Joshua had brought about that day of rest,
then David would never have spoken of another day.

And that day has come in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus Christ “Today” has dawned.

And because this final “Today” has come in Christ,

therefore “there remains a Sabbath-rest (or Sabbath-celebration) for the people of God,
for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works
as God did from his.”

God entered his rest (ceased from his creative work) on the seventh day.
We enter that rest (ceasing from our creative work) on our Sabbath-rest.

Some have tried to say that we are living in the eschatological Sabbath,
and that we have entered God's rest in Christ.

And there is a sense in which that is true.

But that is NOT what Hebrews says.

Hebrews says that we must still "strive to enter that rest."

In other words,

we have not *yet* entered God's rest.

Yes, Jesus (our Joshua) has entered God's rest.

You, however, are still at the point of decision at Kadesh in the wilderness.

Will you believe God's promises in Jesus Christ?

Or will you rebel and perish in the wilderness?

Hebrews does not explicitly say that Sunday is the Christian Sabbath.

Plainly Hebrews is not very friendly to the idea of the Saturday Sabbath.

The seventh day, for Hebrews, is insufficient.

There must be another day.

And given the fact that the book of Acts speaks of the regular gathering
of the people of God on the first day of the week for worship,
it is easy to see a sort of argument from analogy here.

Later on in Hebrews, he will portray the corporate worship of the church
as participating in the heavenly worship (Heb 12).

Even though we have not yet entered our rest,
we have a foretaste of it in our worship.

When you hear the message proclaimed,
and you respond to it with faith,
you are striving to enter your rest.

Hebrews seems to be using the weekly Sabbath-celebration as a picture of the future.

The attempt to eliminate any weekly Sabbath has a gnostic flavor.

If the sabbath-celebration is entirely future,
then how do you know that it is going to happen?

The weekly sabbath-celebration which we celebrate every Sunday
is a sure sign to the church that we are still "on the way."

We are the eschatological community—we are those who live in anticipation
of that final sabbath-rest.

And so our weekly sabbath-rest functions as a sign,
reminding us week-by-week that we are still walking by faith.

This is why Hebrews will later admonish his hearers:

“Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as is the habit of some”
You need each other!
And you need to be reminded of who you are in Christ

Conclusion: Entering God’s Rest

Remember what we said earlier:

The Fourth Commandment makes three points:

- 1) six days are for your labor to reflect God’s labor;
 one day is for your rest to reflect God’s rest
- 2) This day is not merely for you to rest--it is a day where you give rest to others as well
- 3) This is a day for remembering

Because I want to keep our eyes on the joy of this day.

In a world where stress is the order of the day,

 God commands you to rest.

In the midst of the miseries of this life,

 God calls you to rejoice in his gracious provision.

Remember the Sabbath.

 Remember how God created all things in the space of six days,

 and how he rested on the seventh day,

 blessing that day and setting it apart for you to rest and worship him.

 Remember how God sent his only begotten Son

 to die on the cross, and rest in the grave for that final Sabbath,

 arising from the dead on the First Day of the New Creation –

 giving rest *to you!*

 Remember how God sent his Holy Spirit on the first day of the week,

 that first Pentecost Sunday, in order to give us new life.

Sure, I can make some suggestions for your family:

 don’t stay up late Saturday night;

 spend Saturday evening in family worship, preparing for the Lord’s Day;

 prepare whatever you can on Saturday evening, so Sunday morning isn’t rushed.

But best of all:

 Remember the Sabbath.

 Remember that glorious eschatological rest that awaits us in Christ!

 Remember that each Sunday you get a brief foretaste of that glory,

 as you are called to set aside the cares of the week,

 turn away from your self-centered focus,

 and spend the day simply and solely in the service of your creator and redeemer.